

FOREIGN INFLUENCES IN ENGLISH: ON DEVELOPING LANGUAGE AWARENESS

1. Introduction

There are a number of expressions used in English which have their origin in other languages. English is a flexible language that absorbs foreign expressions, which are then no longer considered 'not English'. Pointing to borrowings into English may both make a change in classroom routines and foster students' language awareness.

Teaching my students foreign words and phrases that enter the English language has turned out to be something new for them. They have become not only interested in improving their language skills, but also in learning **about** the language.

The aim of this article is to present a few exercises which I use to teach foreign words and phrases in English. The materials I have compiled for this purpose target students at levels B2 and upwards and come from different sources, ranging from works of literature such as 'Crime and Punishment' by Dostoyevsky to textbooks used in a classroom.

2. Examples of exercises

To begin with, I selected some examples from various works of literature:

1. 'He has the good nature of success and none of the *morgue*; he has not our confoundedly irritable French vanity' (James 1963: 86).
2. '....., and it is true, Mr. Captian, he tore sein rock. And then he shouted that *man muss* pay him fifteen roubles damages. And I did pay him, Mr. Captain, five roubles for sein rock' (Dostoyevsky 1999: 117).
3. '.....if caught spying he will be declared *persona non grata* and expelled' (Forsyth 1995: 223).
4. '.... it was as if all those cities where fate had fixed our various *rendezvous* without ever' (Nabokov 2001: 198).

These usually not only serve as an illustration of this aspect of the language but also provoke a vivid discussion. They can be successfully used as warm-up activities followed by exercises below.

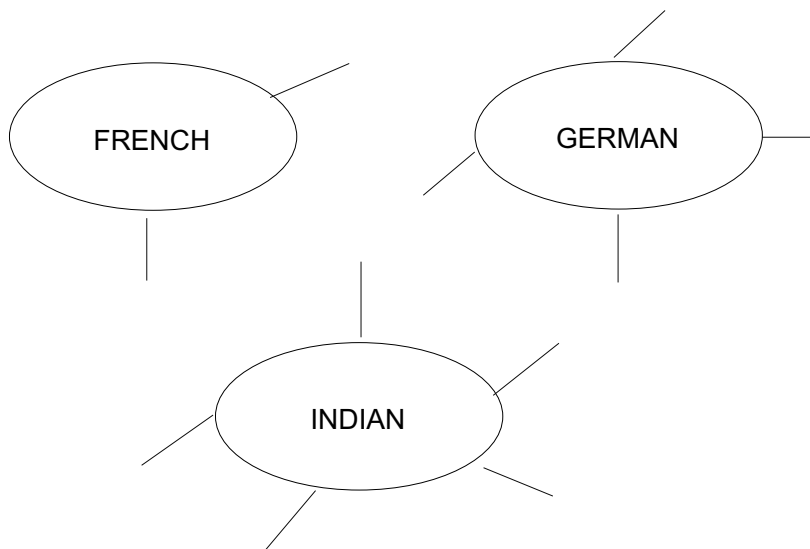
Ex. 1a

Students get a list of words and write them in the table below (some vocabulary may require clarification, which the teacher can do after students have completed the table or the teacher can elicit the meaning from students):

au gratin, siesta, bungalow, sky, autobahn, jungle, shampoo, balcony, blitz, chic, plaza, verandah, rucksack, gondola, pyjamas, geysir, hamburger,
e.g.:

FRENCH	GERMAN	INDIAN	SPANISH	ITALIAN	SCANDINAVIAN
<i>au gratin</i>	<i>blitz</i>	<i>jungle</i>	<i>siesta</i>	<i>balcony</i>	<i>sky</i>

The vocabulary can be presented in form of a table, as above, or a wordmap, as below:



Ex. 1b

Make sentences with the words from the table (ex. 1a), each sentence must include a word and its origin, e.g.:

*Did you know there's no speed limit on **German autobahns**?*

or

*It was a mistake to sleep on the **verandah** when I was in **India**, I was nearly eaten by mosquitoes.*

Ex. 2

The examples of words and phrases in the exercise below come from a book entitled '*Advanced Vocabulary and Idiom*' by B.J. Thomas 1995. The author *proposes* four sets of exercises consisting of ten sentences each. Students are asked to complete the sentences using the foreign words and expressions listed at the *beginning* of each exercise. Since all the exercises follow the same pattern, the task may seem something of a chore.

Exercise 1 in the book (p. 97) is as follows:

(extract 1)

'FRENCH Put each of the following expressions into its correct place in the sentences below.'

carte blanche cul-de-sac hors d'oeuvre

- (a) The advantage of living in a _____ is that there is no through traffic, so it's very quiet.
- (b) Let's order, I'm hungry. I'm going to start with a nice _____.
- (c) The boss didn't tell me how he wanted the project carried out. He gave me _____ to do it as I thought best.

Instead of following the same set of instructions suggested by the authors, we can give students a list of words and their phonetic representation, e.g.:

/k ^h l d ^h s ^æ k/	hors d'oeuvre
/ɔː dʒ:v/	cul-de-sac

FOLD HERE

Students fold the piece of paper and look at the phonetic script. They read the phonetic script to the teacher; then they unfold the sheet and match the phonetic script with the expressions. The teacher can either ask them what the expressions mean or suggest that they should use their knowledge and intuition to complete the sentences – deducing the meaning from the context.

Now let us focus on exercise 4 from the set of exercises proposed by B.J. Thomas, which, somewhat monotonously, looks exactly the same as exercises 1,2 and 3 (pp. 97–98):

(extract 2)

MIXED Instructions as above.

siesta kindergarten macho

- (a) A man who is very hard, tough and masculine is sometimes described as '_____'.
 (b) At the age of three she went to a _____ just to learn to play with other children.
 (c) After lunch I like to have a _____ for an hour or two.

Before completing the sentences, students get slips of paper with words and definitions. Each student selects one slip either with a word or with a definition, e.g.:

SIESTA	a short sleep or rest which you have in the early afternoon
KINDERGARTEN	an informal kind of school for young children where they learn things by playing

Students get up and try to find their match. When they have found a person who has the matching word or definition, they put them side by side on the teacher's desk. The teacher checks if students have matched the words and definitions correctly. Next, the teacher reads out the definitions and students shout out the words. After this class-mingle, students complete the sentences.

In this kind of exercise the teacher falls back on students' general knowledge about common expressions in various languages. It is taken for granted that a British, German or Polish student will understand the Spanish word 'macho' without prior explanation on the part of the teacher.

At this moment we can move on to the final phase, which is the production stage. Students are already well-equipped with the vocabulary presented during the class and now they are ready to 'play with the language'.

We can ask students to write a dialogue in which they must include as many foreign words and phrases as possible. Below, I would like to show what my students (Justyna and Kasia – C1) came up with:

J: What did you do yesterday?

K: I got up at 6 a.m.

J: Why so early?

K: I had to drive my daughter to kindergarten. Besides I needed at least half an hour to look chic, because I was going for a job interview afterwards.

J: I didn't know you were looking for a job.

K: Well, yes for some time and my curriculum vitae looks impressive.

J: What kind of job are you after?

K: I'd like to play in an avant garde theatre. I've already made my debut.

J: What did you do later?

K: I had a rendezvous with my boyfriend Peter. He's a motorcyclist and has just won a grand prix, we wanted to celebrate his victory.

J: Where did you go?

K: Peter chose a French restaurant. He's a real gourmet.

J: Did you enjoy the meal?

K: I have to admit that hors d'oeuvre was excellent so was the main course, but the place was full of nouveaux riches.

J: Was it the end of your evening?

K: No, we were kissing in a quiet cul-de-sac as if we were teenagers again.

J: Bravo!!!!

Another type of exercise that can be done at this stage is called 'asking for clarification'. The teacher gives students the following example:

a) – He's a real gourmet.

b) – I beg your pardon?

a) – I mean, he's a person who enjoys good food.

The teacher can either elicit or introduce more 'asking for clarification' phrases, e.g.:

– Sorry?

– What did you say?

– I'm not sure I understand.

– I'm not quite with you.

– I'm afraid I don't get it.

Students work in pairs, they make dialogues as suggested in the example above.

Conclusions

From the examples of various exercises provided above we may conclude that teaching foreign influences in English is not a difficult task. Very often I deal with students who are learning foreign languages other than English. They find it interesting to discover that not only do German, French and Italian adopt English vocabulary, but it also happens the other way round.

When teaching B2 and higher level students it is important to introduce other aspects of a foreign language, not only vocabulary items or grammatical structures. At these levels students have already mastered grammar and vocabulary to such an extent that they are capable of using the foreign language in a variety of situations – both in writing and speaking. I am sure that teaching students foreign influences in English adds to their general knowledge and perception of the language.

Bibliography

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